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## Spooks Need Course in Ghostwriting

In the literature of espionage, truth is often stranger than fiction. A footnote to that literature, which appeared in Washington recently, found Senators publicly exhausting the vocabulary of disapproval while privately murmuring: "Unbelievable, fantastic, incredible."

The cause of all the commotion was a letter from Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, to the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* commending an editorial entitled "Brickbats for Fulbright." The July 18 editorial criticized Sen. J. William Fulbright (D., Ark.) for his Foreign Relations Committee's unsuccessful effort to place three members on the CIA oversight committee. It said the Senate had properly "rebuked" the "crafty Arkansan."

Forgiving the editorial as being "within the limits of irresponsibility which

must be allowed on editorial pages," Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D., Minn.), author of the CIA resolution in the Foreign Relations Committee, read Helms' letter to the Senate and envisioned future election campaigns with CIA letters commending criticisms of other Senators.

The letter printed by the *Globe-Democrat* on July 27 said: "I want to

let you know of my pleasure in reading the editorial 'Brickbats for Fulbright.' ... It reflects so well your paper's policy of 'printing the news impartially, supporting what it believes to be right, and opposing what it believes to be wrong without regard to party politics.'"

A number of Senators, including the chief opponents of the Foreign Relations Committee resolution, rose to express varying degrees of regret, chagrin or shock. After a hurried telephone call, Sen. Leverett Saltonstall (R., Mass.) said Helms had admitted signing the letter and that he was "sorry for the mistake."

As an afterthought, Sen. Fulbright seemed perplexed by Helms' high praise of the newspaper's self-asserted impartiality: "I hope that Mr. Helms is not under the impression that it is a

Democratic newspaper because the word 'Democrat' appears in the title. It is anything but a Democratic newspaper, and it never has been."

No one knows better the hazards of letter writing than members of Congress. Unable to cope personally with the hundreds and often thousands of letters received each day, they are at the mercy of clerks whose passion for anonymity sometimes whets a thirst for glory and recognition.

To restrain the poets and the promoters, Congress has developed the non-letter—still used in its more primitive and illiterate form by the bureaucrats—into a high art form. True, there is no market for a leather-bound collection of Congressional letters, but such Philistine standards will not still the compulsive flow of fast but safe prose.

One Congressional staff is repeatedly admonished to think about how today's letter will look on tomorrow's front page. The admonition has not perceptibly improved either the rhetoric or the typing. On the other hand, copies are not being sent to the *New York Times*, and even the most imaginative spy novelist wouldn't find a clue.

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